

Building Trails to Treasure

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zontal distance, then multiply by 100. There are various leveling tools such as clinometers and the Abney level that may be used to measure slope. GPS devices also measure elevation that can be helpful. To lessen erosion problems, trails should have less than 15% slope. In sandy soils, less than 10% slope is preferred. On steeper terrain, switchbacks may be necessary. Switchbacks are used to change the direction of travel in order to follow the contour with the required slope gradient. Normally, switchbacks take the shape of an "S" as the contour elevation changes.

Saturation is another trail and site degradation process of concern, generally occurring in low-lying terrain near streams, drainages, ponds, springheads, and bogs. Areas that have saturation problems should be avoided. *Alabama's Best Management Practices for Forestry* (BMPs) should be referenced and the best management practices followed when wetland and streams are affected. There is also useful information on proper water diversion installation. However, if the purpose of the trail is to gain access to these areas, additional measures such as foot bridges, fords, and/or fill material may be needed to protect the surrounding landscape. When determining if a bridge is to be built, consider the flooding that may occur after a heavy rainfall. The guidelines in the BMP manual will be helpful. Another consideration for wet or saturated areas is to have an alternate route to be used during wet periods.

Other trail location factors may include locating and identifying timber stand types, sensitive areas, historic sites, scenic areas, springs, endangered plants and wildlife, property lines, and hazard areas such as cliffs, dumps, and others. Decisions should be made as to which areas to include along the trail and which to avoid.

Once the trail has been planned and flagged out, clearing may begin. The clearing process to be used hinges on the purpose of the trail, determined during the planning stage. Width and over hanging vegetation height should be factored into the clearing. If foot traffic is to be the main use, hand-clearing with weed

trimmers, axes, and chainsaws may be all that is needed. The minimum width for a walking trail is four feet wide, but it should be cleared to a height of eight feet. An overhead canopy is desirable to reduce the growth of grasses and shrubs that thrive in the sunlight. Width and height will need to be increased for horseback riding and vehicular traffic.

Trail clearing should be performed in stages as time allows. First, remove blown down trees that may block the trail. These trees may be disposed of, or in some cases, used to line the trail or restrict traffic from sensitive areas. Second, cut the small trees and brush to the appropriate width and height. Cut off stems as close to flush with the ground as possible. Prune branches as close to the main trunk or at forks to make their removal look more natural. Follow proper pruning techniques to encourage faster healing over. Toxic plants such as poison ivy and stinging nettle may need to be chemically controlled along the edge of the trail. Herbicides may be used to reduce vegetation re-growth, control encroaching aggressive shrubs and vines, and maintain an open walkway. Always follow the product label when applying herbicides.

Normally, trail maintenance should be performed twice a year. Spring and late fall are considered preferable times, when temperatures are moderate. Trail signage can range from none to excessive. Signage may be used to identify different trails, trail direction, and intersections, as well as indicate points of interest, hazards, and educational features. Signs should be kept to a minimum, as small as necessary, concisely worded, and placed where best to achieve the intent of the sign while minimizing its visual impact.

With the best of planning, there will be areas along the trail that can be improved upon. Continue to identify these areas and work them into the maintenance plan.

Finally, once the trail has been established, use it. Spend time with your family and friends, sharing your property and the TREASURE Forest concept. 🌲

A new trail of trees, located at Town Creek Park in Auburn, offers a walk through nature and history at the same time. The approximately one-quarter mile trail is lined with 34 trees connected to important people or events in American history. Each tree is accompanied by a plaque which gives a brief description of why the person or event is "historically significant," as well as the tree's Latin name, approximate life span, growth rate, and mature height and spread.

The idea for the project originated in 2003 with the Auburn Tree Commission. They developed a plan in collaboration with the City of Auburn Parks and Recreation Department, then Dyas Toyota offered considerable financial support to purchase the trees and plaques. James Jennings, Auburn's urban forester and City Arborist, cared for the seedlings until they could be planted. On Arbor Day in 2005, a number of volunteers joined the Tree Commission for a tree planting party. Also, Auburn's Forestry Club students planted 50 one-year-old longleaf pine seedlings all along the perimeter of the main trail that were donated by the Nursery Cooperative of Auburn University's School of Forestry. Finally, in September of 2006 the community celebrated the ribbon cutting and grand opening of the new trail.

These young trees are actually direct descendants of the original trees tied to some of our nation's most memorable moments in history, such as the still-living honey locust near which President Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address in 1863. While some of the trees were donated by community members, the majority were purchased from the Historic Tree Nursery of American Forests, a national non-profit conservation organization that in 1917 began collecting, nurturing, and documenting seeds and cuttings from historical trees. A Certificate of Authenticity is issued for each specimen purchased from American Forests.

According to George Bengtson, project coordinator and Tree Commission member, the organizers were sensitive regarding issues of gender and race when selecting the trees for the trail. Plus, about one third of the trees are

AUBURN's

New *Historic Tree Trail*

By *Elishia Ballentine*, Editor

Photos by Elishia Ballentine

linked to Alabama in some way. For instance, a beautiful Helen Keller southern magnolia, the first tree planted back in 2004, serves as the cornerstone of the trail. The rest highlight a cross-section of places and American heroes including presidents, military leaders, explorers, naturalists, inventors, authors, and others who contributed to the history of our nation. There's also the State Tree of Alabama, a southern longleaf pine; as well as a southern baldcypress, both important to early settlers of our state; and of course, a baby Live Oak from Toomer's Corner. 🌳



Students from Mrs. Williams' fourth grade class at the neighboring Wright's Mill Road Elementary School experience a "living classroom" while studying the origins of the historically significant trees along Auburn's new trail. "Venture" science teacher, Mrs. Susie Criswell, poses with students as she teaches them an appreciation of the southern longleaf pine, the State Tree of Alabama.

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